

Washington State's PTSD Counseling Program

Since 1984, the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs has maintained a one-of-a-kind, state-funded outreach/counseling program designed to provide confidential counseling services to veterans with war-era and PTSD-related problems.

As of May 3, 1991, Washington became the first state to establish a Post Traumatic Stress Disorder treatment program in state law (HB2095). This law also expanded counseling services to Persian Gulf veterans and Washington National Guard and Military Reserves activated for Operation Desert Storm. Significantly, the program also provides counseling to all war-era veterans and their family members.

Innovative outreach and treatment methods have enhanced the effectiveness of individual, couples, family and group counseling. When needed, veterans are referred for other specialized or inpatient care. This is accomplished through a network of consultation and referral resources which have become a model of county, state and federal cooperation.

Currently, the state contracts with 21 specialized counselors to help veterans resolve their war-related PTSD readjustment issues.

What are the Symptoms of PTSD?

Most people who are exposed to sudden, dangerous or deadly events—or who are psychologically overwhelmed by these experiences—will more than likely experience many of the following:

- Startle reactions to noise or sudden movements
- Reliving of traumatic memories
- Hostile or suicidal feelings and impulses
- Profound grief reactions—or no emotions at all—when showing feelings would be considered normal
- Problems with intimacy and/or interpersonal relationships
- Avoidance of certain people, movies or topics related to trauma events
- Hyperalert to threats to self or loved ones
- Sleep problems, dreams and nightmares
- Excessive need to control outcomes
- Guilt, depression or lack of emotion
- Concentration and memory problems
- Anniversary reactions to the trauma
- Alcohol and/or other substance abuse
- Anxiety and hyperarousal
- Marital problems
- Employment difficulties
- Authority problems

Will Time Heal these PTSD Reactions?

Experts agree the mere passage of time will not relieve PTSD. The longer one waits, the more difficult management may become. On the other hand, it is never too late to start counseling. The use of alcohol, a workaholic life style or avoidance, either increases the intensity of the symptoms, or delays resolution. Often, the veteran with PTSD will risk everything before seeking help.

Who is Eligible for PTSD Counseling?

A recent study by an independent research firm estimates there are more than 70,000 veterans in Washington state suffering from PTSD symptoms.

While the PTSD Program is primarily structured to address the special needs of Vietnam veterans, Washington National Guard, and Military Reserves of the Gulf War, WDVA realizes all veterans who have served during our nation's war eras may have a need to be seen by one of our counselors. All honorably discharged wartime veterans and family members—including veterans from WWII, Korea, and the various recent periods of conflict and peace-keeping operations—are eligible for counseling.

PTSD can happen to anyone who has been exposed to enough traumatic experiences.

What is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder?

Traumatic events—war, combat, natural disasters and other life-threatening experiences—have always been a part of human experience. However, the impact of these events on the survivors was not more fully understood until recently.

We now know that traumatic events change the survivor psychologically, biologically, and socially.

While it was long-believed that Vietnam veterans were more prone to PTSD, it is now apparent the culture, the times, the homecoming, and the war's outcome, all influence the way symptoms are manifested. Untreated, PTSD is highly predictive of physical illness, disrupted family life, and poor career performance. As a result, we tend to see veterans from different wars express PTSD symptoms in era-specific ways.

Call 1-800-562-2308

How do I find a PTSD Counselor?

WDVA PTSD Counseling is currently available in these counties:

Benton	Clallam
Cowlitz	Ferry
Franklin	Grant
Grays Harbor	Island
King	Kitsap
Kittitas	Lewis
Okanogan	Pacific
Pend Oreille	San Juan
Skagit	Snohomish
Stevens	Thurston
Yakima	

To locate a counselor in your area, contact the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs at the number listed below. Outreach to Reserve and National Guard units is also available statewide.

Consultation to mental health centers, governmental agencies, and other professionals providing counseling to veterans and their families is available upon request.

Thomas Schumacher, Program Director
1011 Plum Street, 2nd Floor
PO Box 41150
Olympia, WA 98504-1150
(360) 725-2189 or 1-800-562-2308

Pamphlet available in alternative formats upon request.
Printed 2/02